



# For the Love of the Land

by Elishia Johnson, Editor

The year was 1953, and Rebecca Langford had hoped for a new car on her birthday. When she received two tires and a piece of land instead, she wasn't real happy. Looking back now, she laughs about it and says that was just the beginning.

When Dr. John Langford and his bride acquired that first parcel of land, they never dreamed just how the acreage would increase. Today they own property in Crenshaw, Covington, and Pike counties in Alabama as well as in Florida. Timber covers 80% of their land with more than 2000 acres planted in loblolly pines, 325 acres in longleaf pines, over 1000 acres in naturally-regenerated pines, and 400-500 acres in hardwood.

It must have seemed the perfect match. Both Dr. and Mrs. Langford appreciated nature, enjoying the woods, wildlife, and wild flowers. She said, "He loved the land . . . I had always loved trees and I loved my husband." However, Miss Rebecca states that the time finally arrived several years ago when she was actually ready for him to stop buying property. Dr. Langford sheepishly admits, "Every time I had an extra two dollars, I bought land." The last purchase was 52 acres, just two years ago.

Upon retiring from his 42-year practice as a successful veterinarian in Daytona Beach and her career from teaching school, the couple moved back to their native Alabama in 1992. After years of living in the city, they both knew it would be "nice to live in the country."

Growing up on a 120-acre farm, it was definitely a love of the land that prompted Dr. Langford to buy land at every opportunity. He was also influenced by his older brothers who were all interested in land development. "They provided good role models for me . . . especially my brother Jordan who advised me that forestland would be a good investment. He was right!"

Another influence on Dr. Langford's intensive forest management theory was a book which he says "profoundly affected" him. When he was 14 years old, Dr. Langford read *Our Wasted Land*. Explaining that environmentalism was a new concept at the time, "It described how we had abused the land, particularly in the South, with erosion and gullies. It encouraged 'maximum production' while at the same time stimulating my interest in land conservation. This book taught me not to waste. It helped formulate my philosophy that the best environmental-

ists are landowners. We have an investment in the land."

Miss Rebecca echoed this belief, "I hate to see land just lie vacant and erode. It's a great shame not to use what you have."

First learning about the TREASURE Forest program through a neighbor, Dr. and Mrs. Langford themselves became certified as TREASURE Forest landowners in 1999. He recalled how honored they felt to be accepted into an organization with such high standards. They set goals to not only meet, but even surpass those standards. Then in 2001, the Langfords achieved the supreme prize of excellence with the Helene Mosley Award.

The primary objective of the Langfords' land management strategy is to grow timber. Their secondary objectives include wildlife, clean water, and aesthetics. This plan incorporates practices such as harvesting, reforestation, prescribed burns, spraying to prevent competition among young trees, plowing fire lanes, as well as keeping roads mowed and borders trimmed.

Although the Langfords don't hunt their land, they both love animals and enjoy watching wildlife. Several schemes are employed to ensure an



abundant variety. They plant food plots twice yearly such as wheat, rye, oats, clover, bahiagrass, and lespedeza in the fall; sunflower, corn, and sorghum in the spring. When harvesting timber, they save big oaks which supply acorns for the deer and turkey. They are also careful to leave briars and brush piles which provide cover for small animals and allow escape from predators. They are presently attempting to encourage a quail population.

Following his retirement Dr. Langford attended a herbicide conference and it really sparked his interest. He had graduated from Auburn University School of Veterinary Medicine in 1951. Now, all these years later he decided to become a student again! He attended Forestry School at Lurleen B. Wallace (LBW) Community College in Andalusia. These courses opened his eyes to all the possibilities if he did a better job of planting, harvesting, and making roads. In addition to learning practical skills such as burning every three years, he also gained insight into improving the land aesthetically and attaining the maximum amount of wildlife on the property.

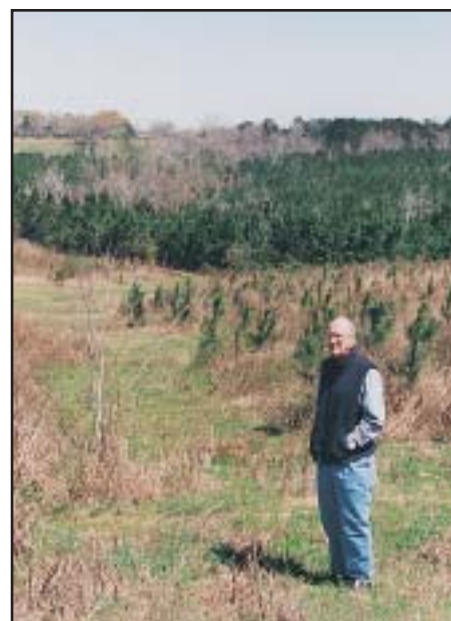
Dr. Langford's advice to all potential landowners is this: "Before you start, get all the information you can; attain all the knowledge possible because you will need it! People should also take advantage of the assistance available from the Alabama Forestry Commission, the Farm Service Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. These folks are most gracious to help, they have all bent over backwards for us."



*Dr. John and Rebecca Langford retired to their Alabama home in 1992.*

According to Dr. Langford, his greatest challenges have been presented by gullies and Kudzu! One of his most gratifying achievements has been reclaiming the century-old gullies. This practice, he assuredly states, "makes the surrounding land more valuable." Over the years they have not only reclaimed 50 acres of gullies and eradicated 50 acres of kudzu, but they have also improved or built 17 miles of road. Dr. Langford noted that after timber is cut, roads typically need repair and stabilization.

In addition to personally planting all of the trees and the other tree farming duties, the couple stays "pretty busy," as Mrs. Langford put it. That appears to be an understatement when you consider all the organizations they are involved with:



*What was once a useless gully is now a fertile valley of pines.*

Tree Farmers of America, Alabama Landowners' Association, the Longleaf Alliance, as well as three different chapters of the TREASURE Forest Association (Covington, Crenshaw, and Pike counties)! He's also active in Gideons International, his veterinary association, and the local volunteer fire department. They both teach Sunday School and he's also a deacon.

Michael Older of the Alabama Forestry Commission proudly refers to the Langfords as "the poster family" of stewardship. When asked why they both continued to work so hard rather than sitting



*Alabama Forestry Commission Covington County Manager Michael Older and Dr. Langford often walk the property and share tree farming information.*





*Dr. Langford surveys the success of a recent prescribed burn in a stand of loblolly pines.*

back and enjoying retirement, Dr. Langford stressed that one must “use his time wisely.” Both he and Mrs. Langford inherited a strong work ethic from their parents and grandparents. Dr. Langford said that he simply follows the Biblical example of working six days and resting on the seventh day. He feels that people who work hard get along better in life. On this point, Miss Rebecca chuckled that she and her husband didn’t necessarily share that same philosophy . . . she would

be quite happy to have a bit more leisure time than just the one day each week! But even with her good-natured teasing, it’s obvious how proud Miss Rebecca is of her husband. “He’s a very dedicated man: an outstanding veterinarian and an outstanding forester.”

The Langfords hope their two sons and four grandchildren will carry on the TREASURE Forest tradition. “Our oldest son hunts, fishes, and loves the woods. Our youngest son only shoots with a camera, but they both seem to have the same philosophy of the land.”

One of their favorite aspects of owning a TREASURE Forest is sharing their land with others through various outreach programs. They have hosted several workshops for forestry students from LBW Community College and tours for the Covington and Crenshaw County TREASURE Forest Associations. With her background in education, Miss Rebecca particularly enjoys the opportunity to share with children and looks forward to the elementary school field trips each year. She says it is so rewarding to see their faces as they personally experience nature, often for the first time in their lives.



*Mike Older and Dr. Langford inspect a young planted pine.*

Dr. Langford’s unofficial motto would have to be: “Always strive for excellence.” All one must do is look around and see the obvious rewards of the Langfords’ hard work. The trees speak for themselves, ranging in age anywhere from nearly 50 years to 3 or 4 months old. He has planted trees every year since 1953! He admits, his greatest joy is watching trees grow. When asked if he knew exactly what his success rate was, he stated that he’s had 80% survival with long leaf pines and 90-95% with loblolly. According to Dr. Langford, “There is such satisfaction in planting seedlings in the ground; watching them progress for a few years; then thinning them.”

The Langfords’ latest project is to enhance the forest with dogwoods, red buds, and wild azaleas. The major



*The Langfords and Sheba.*

improvements having been accomplished, they can now concentrate on aesthetics and beautification of the land. It is important that the property be pretty . . . Miss Rebecca is an artist and Dr. Langford says the land inspires her to paint pretty pictures.

As for the future, Dr. Langford says they’ll keep doing what they’ve been doing. “And there’s always more kudzu to kill!” 🍷